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MONTANA POST PRESERVATION

August - September 1981
Montana State Historic Preservation Office

Surveying Montana Properties

Montanans have always been interested in where they live and how they got there, often recording the story of their community or area in some lovingly-prepared history written by local residents. But in 1979, Livingston began a new generation of community studies with its Historic Resource Survey, the first of its kind in Montana. Other inventories of historic properties had been done before in the state, but Livingston was the first community to look systematically at *all* its buildings. It wasn't the last.

Twenty historic and architectural surveys have been started in Montana since Livingston's, including full inventories of numerous communities, a look at all one-room schoolhouses in Gallatin County, and an inventory of all institutional state-owned buildings. Although these surveys differ in scope, sources of funding and methods, they all aim towards the same result, a careful and comprehensive look at "what's out there."

If you're interested in what's out there in your community or area, consider planning an historic resource survey. A survey need not be difficult, but it does require some time and thought. You may want to take a few tips from those communities with experience in the process.

The first step in a survey is simply deciding what to look at. This means taking a quick look at the area to outline clear and reasonable boundaries for the actual building-by-building inventory. The scope of the survey area may differ from town to town. Butte has found that a series of interlocking surveys, each one concentrating on a separate section of the city, will best serve its needs, while Hot Springs is planning a survey of the whole town.

Consider the uses to be made of the survey information when determining inventory boundaries. If there is a part of the community subject to change in the near future, it should probably be included in the survey. The purpose of a survey is not to save all older buildings, but to look at what's there in order to determine what is worth saving and how best to do it. If a downtown area is scheduled for revitalization, the buildings there should be looked at to see what most needs work and also what is worth working on. Each community and area will have different needs depending on its size, location, the way it has developed and what will be happening to it in the future.

The next step in the survey process could be called "doing one's homework." Before going out to look at the individual buildings, the history and background of the survey area should be researched. This means reading historical studies of the area, collecting old photographs, architectural papers and maps, and documenting the significant people and events that influenced the area's development. Some towns, such as Red Lodge, already have very good town histories published. In other communities the history may not have been written down, but still lives in the memories of long-time residents. Interviews with "old-timers" were an essential source of historical information for the Troy survey. In Kalispell, senior citizens were invited to a special meeting to share their knowledge of the town's history, older buildings, and early residents. Other sources might be letters, diaries, newspapers and journals.

This preliminary historical overview should uncover the potential significance of certain properties that might otherwise be overlooked. Buildings of outstanding architectural merit, such as elaborate mansions or train depots, are easy to spot, but the historical value of many structures doesn't show on the outside. As an example, in Billings the surveyors first thought that one rather nondescript neighborhood of small homes was probably built in the 1920s and therefore not vitally important to the

Streetscapes such as this one on Butte's north side are what surveyors will be examining in Montana communities.

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survey. But after the historical search, they found that the neighborhood was actually built in the 1880-1890 period! That made it one of the first neighborhoods in town. The Billings survey also had individuals compile histories on their own neighborhoods. The results have heightened the residents' awareness of their history and their own neighborhoods' significance.

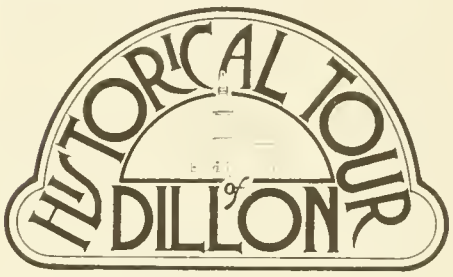
After the survey boundaries are set up and the historical background is researched, the step-by-step looking begins. The key to this inventory phase is actually looking at and recording each structure in the area. The buildings are described, photographed and mapped with the aid of an inventory form. (See example of the form included in this issue of *Preservation.*) Surveyors are careful to note the alterations to a structure over the years, the presence and function of the outbuildings and any interesting design features.

Follow-up research on specific buildings will need to be done to determine the date of their construction, who the original owner was, and how the building was used through the years. All this information is added to the inventory form for a more complete evaluation of the property's historical significance. This research is often done in the county courthouse by looking at tax records, plat books, and city directories. In Billings, a large number of volunteers in teams of two tackled the courthouse records. In Missoula, in addition to records research, surveyors have set out to investigate a wide range of special topics. One person became interested in the background of street names and went on to compile a history of the persons or events associated with the naming of Missoula's streets.

The next step is deciding what is important in the wealth of information gathered during the inventory. This evaluation should involve a variety of people, including historians and community officials. Determining which homes and buildings are significant in a community should be based on the structures' historical and architectural value for that community. Historical values include more than a building's having been owned by an important member of the community. The use a building was put to, such as blacksmith shop, dairy, post office, etc., may demonstrate early commercial patterns, and changes in building use can document social history, such as Kalispell's Masonic Temple that now houses a Coast to Coast store.

While nominations to the National Register of Historic Places are not the principal reason for doing a historic resource survey, the documentation on structures within the survey area ought to be sufficient for a "determination of eligibility," if that is desired. The survey in Deer Lodge is being done partly to determine which properties are eligible for nomination, as well as to set up a self-directed walking tour of the town. Dillon and Livingston already have published walking tour brochures based on the information gathered in their surveys.

The last step in an historic resource survey ties in with the first step. What are going to be the future needs of the community and area? How can the survey information be used to help meet those needs? A survey provides a community with much more than a forgotten set of forms and photographs locked away in some file cabinet. Information gathered in a survey is available to the public, both in the Preservation Office in Helena and at the local courthouse, library or planning office. Publicizing the evaluation, such as in a brochure or an organized exhibit, allows a wide range of people to come to know and appreciate the significance of historic properties. The Northern Cheyenne tribe is planning to use the information gathered in the survey of their reservation in high-school history classes. Adult education classes through local schools and historical societies are another possibility.



Logotype from the Dillon walking tour brochure.

The information from the survey is also useful for local planners and other citizens interested in preservation. Besides pointing out those properties which are genuinely historic, the inventory data can give planners a clear and well-informed basis for future zoning and development decisions. Respecting important and irreplaceable buildings and structures from the past and incorporating these in future development aids incalculably in a community's retaining its "sense of self." Livingston and all these other Montana towns know this. Your town can too.

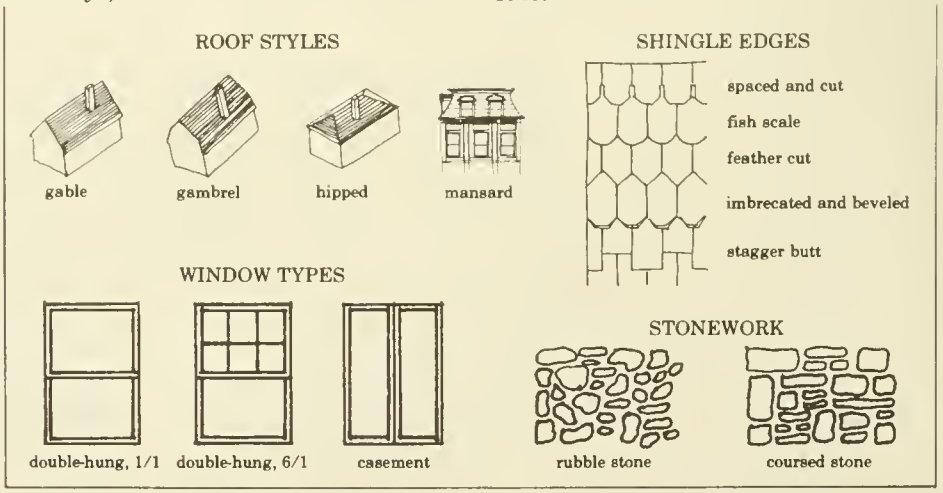
For your own use ➡

With all this interest in historic resource surveys, do you wonder what sort of information a survey gathers? Take a look around your own home. If you were going to inventory it, where would you start? Reproduced on the following pages is the inventory form being used right now for surveys throughout Montana. Try actually completing it, for your house or some other interesting building, following the instructions on the form and the information below. (If you don't live in Montana, contact your state's Preservation Office for a copy of their form.)

This can be more than just a casual exercise, too. Send the completed form to our office and we'll add it to our growing inventory of Montana properties. Be sure to attach a photograph (a Polaroid works well) and sketch the floorplan and the site, showing how the building relates to streets, driveways, etc.

Some structural terms are illustrated by the drawings below; the terms refer to features commonly found in most Montana towns. For instance, under "number of stories," the choices include 1½, 2½ and 3½. If a house has dormers added to make living space out of an attic, as many houses do, this is called a "half-story."

Send your completed form to the State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, 225 N. Roberts, Helena, 59620. If you'd also like to investigate the history of a building which seems particularly significant, write for a free copy of our booklet, "How to Research the History of Older Buildings." If you need help in understanding architectural styles a good reference is John J. Blumenson's *Identifying American Architecture, A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600—1945.*



MONTANA HISTORIC * ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY

CONTACT PHOTO

LEGAL LOCATION: _____ DATE: _____
addition block lot(s)

ADDRESS: _____
no. street city county

OWNERSHIP:
☐ public
☐ private

name: _____

address: _____

N NE E SE S SW W NW
roll #_____ frame #_____

sketch plan with arrow north

HISTORIC NAME: _____
ORIGINAL OWNER: _____
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: _____ ☐ documented ☐ estimate
COMMON NAME: _____
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: _____
ORIGINAL USE: _____
PRESENT USE: _____

RESEARCH SOURCES:
☐ abstract of title
☐ plat records/maps
☐ tax cards
☐ building permit
☐ Sanborn maps
☐ sewer permit
☐ city directories
☐ obituaries
☐ biography
other _____

SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:
☐ open land
☐ scattered buildings
☐ high building density
☐ residential
☐ agricultural
☐ commercial
☐ industrial

NUMBER OF STORIES:
1 1½ 2 2½ 3 3½

CHIMNEYS: position and number

FOUNDATION:
☐ rubble stone
☐ coursed stone
☐ concrete
☐ concrete block
☐ other

BUILDING TYPE/ARCHITECTURAL STYLE:

ROOF: (type)
☐ gable
☐ gambrel
☐ hipped
☐ dormers
☐ combination
☐ flat
☐ shed
☐ mansard
☐ turret

(covering)
☐ wood shingle
☐ metal
☐ wood shake
☐ slate
☐ asphalt

WINDOWS: (type)
☐ double hung
☐ casement
☐ fixed

(sash arrangement)
1/1 2/2 4/4
2/1 3/1 4/1
other _____

EXTERIOR MATERIALS:
☐ brick (coursing & color) _____
☐ stone (coursing & type) _____
☐ log (notch type) _____
☐ shingle (edge type) _____
☐ clapboard
☐ shiplap
☐ stucco
☐ asbestos siding
☐ aluminum siding
other:

OUTBUILDINGS:
☐ barns
☐ sheds
☐ garage
☐ carriage house
☐ sauna
other: _____

Describe significant architectural features and note any additions, alterations, & changes in materials.
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Describe important persons, events, and/or historical patterns associated with structure, site and surrounding area.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE: Explain how location, design, materials, and/or workmanship contribute to the property's significance.

INFORMATION VALUE: Explain how the extant structure/site may demonstrate or yield information about its historic use or construction.

CONTRIBUTION TO A DISTRICT: Describe the visual and historic relationship between the structure/site and the surrounding area.

FORM PREPARED BY:
Name:_____ Telephone Number:_____
Address:_____ Date:_____

SHPO COMMENTS:

SEND TO:
MONTANA STATE HISTORIC
PRESERVATION OFFICE
225 N. Roberts
Helena, MT 59620

UTM Reference:____/_____/_____ USGS map_____ Sec_____ T_____ R_____

Montana Historic Bridge Inventory

by Fredric L. Quivik

EDITOR'S NOTE: While Montana's Historic Resource Surveys have so far been limited to buildings and sites, other visible traces of the state's history also remain, ready to yield their stories to the careful surveyor. Engineering structures, such as tunnels, bridges and water towers, can prove as valuable in tracing the development of Montana as the buildings of the towns they served.

The following article describes such a structures survey, the Montana Historic Bridge Inventory. Bridges included in the Inventory range from the massive 825-foot Ft. Benton Bridge over the Missouri River, to the wooden truss Coburg Bridge spanning the Milk River. Following the history of bridge-building in Montana is one way of discovering how we have traveled from there to here, across the river and into today.

The Montana Historic Bridge Inventory was begun in 1979 by the Montana State Highway Department and the Historic American Engineering Record. It documents all public and many private bridges in Montana older than forty-five years and over twenty feet in span.

It is the responsibility of the Highway Department to protect cultural resources from the adverse effects of federal aid highway projects. Because federal money is used to repair and replace bridges in Montana, the Highway Department needed an inventory of all old bridges in the state to determine their significance and to make responsible decisions on their fate.

This inventory was planned through a joint agreement between the State Historic Preservation Office, the Office of Planning & Research at the Highway Department, and the Historic American Engineering Record. HAER has since merged with the Historic American Buildings Survey to form the National Architecture and Engineering Record, a division of the National Park Service. The inventory cost $33,500, paid by the Highway Department with U.S. Department of Transportation monies.

Inventorying all bridges in the state in one coordinated study accomplished three things: It provided an historical and structural context which allowed a more accurate determination of the significance of individual bridges; it was much cheaper than inventorying the state's many bridges piecemeal; and the results of the inventory can be used in the planning process for future bridge projects. This should prevent costly delays once a project has begun.

The Montana Historic Bridge Inventory involved several stages. Field work began with visits to all qualifying bridges. Public bridges were located through Highway Department records. Private vehicular bridges (on ranches) were found, with luck, simply by watching from the roads and asking local residents and road crews where the bridges could be found.

Railroad bridges were also included—easily located on maps. Even though this project was a Highway Department inventory, it was necessary to document railroad bridges to create the overall context of Montana's transportation history. Unlike the public bridges, however, only the more significant and representative railroad bridges were considered.

Each bridge was photographed and sketched, and a description of the structure and its condition was written. Historical records were researched after the site visit to determine dates of construction and possible modification, bridge designer and builder, and other pertinent historical information. Most of the documentation existed in the county courthouses since many of the bridges inventoried were county-owned and not on the Federal Aid System. County records varied greatly in extent and quality of information, but the Highway Department has a near complete collection of historical information for bridges on the Federal Aid System.

Preparing inventory cards for each bridge was the next stage of the inventory. Each completed card contains information on ownership, condition, description of structure and history, photographs, and site map. About 500 standardized NAER inventory cards (8x10) were prepared. Copies were filed at the State Highway Department and the State Historical Preservation Office in Helena. Copies were also sent to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and the National Park Service Regional Office in Denver.

After on-site and background information was gathered, the bridges were then categorized. Category I bridges are the twenty most significant bridges in the state, slated to receive additional documentation. Category II bridges are other historically significant bridges; fifty-eight of these were found. (The State Historic Preservation Office is preparing a thematic nomination to the National Register of Historic Places this summer for all seventy-eight Category I and II bridges.) Category III bridges are those which are not eligible for the Register or for which enough information was not available during the Inventory to determine their eligibility.

The next step in the Inventory was preparing a final report. This contained a general historical narrative about bridge building in Montana and described the significance of each of the Category I and II bridges. The historical narrative is important because many individual bridges are not structurally important, although they played a significant role in Montana's economic history as it relates to transportation.

In April 1981, the Inventory was presented by NAER to the Montana Highway Department, SHPO, and the Bridge Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee was appointed by the Highway Department to ratify NAER's findings. It represents state engineers, historians, and the State Historic Preservation Review Committee. The findings of the Montana Historic Bridge Inventory wre approved and accepted. They were accompanied by some recommendations for minor modifications in the final report and the categorization of bridges.

Once the assignment of bridges to Category I had been approved, NAER proceeded with more detailed documentation. Each of the twenty Category I bridges was recorded in further detail by NAER's photographer. Black and white photographs were taken of each bridge, including contextual shots, profile, portal and ¾ views, and numerous details of the

The Snowden Bridge over the Missouri, just west of the North Dakota border, was built by the Great Northern Railroad in 1913. Its 296-foot vertical lift span was designed to allow riverboats to pass underneath.

structural connections between various elements of the bridge.

The last stage of the Montana Historic Bridge Inventory, publication of the final report, is accompanied by the NAER photographs, as well as photographs reprinted from the Historical Society and Highway Department Archives. The publication was prepared at the U.S. Park Service Regional Office in Denver.

The Inventory found that many of Montana's bridges have been destroyed with little or no documentation. Many surviving historic bridges lack maintenance. The initial documentation on the surviving bridges provided by the Inventory will help ensure careful consideration of the cultural resources affected before historically significant bridges are modified or destroyed. The Inventory will also inform Montanans of the importance of our historic bridges, encouraging us to keep them in better repair in the future.

Below, a 1912 bridge over the Judith River near Ross Fork is representative of the type commonly built in Montana 1910-1917, the riveted Warren pony truss. At right, the oldest surviving bridge in Eastern Montana is the Tongue River Bridge in Miles City, a sub-divided steel truss bridge built in 1897.

Lodge Grass's timely survey

by Deborah Rokita

The town of Lodge Grass, population 776, is the only incorporated town within the boundaries of the Crow Indian Reservation. One of the earliest settlements in the area, Lodge Grass was a thriving community with many prestigious Crow chiefs and prominent ranchers living in and near the town even before its incorporation in 1927.

During the past year, Lodge Grass has been using a HUD Community Development Block Grant for housing rehabilitation. This summer, due to more awareness of their town from the Housing Rehabilitation project and a coal development contract recently signed between the Crow Tribe and Shell Oil, the business community and Senior Citizen group of Lodge Grass requested that a historic survey be undertaken. A portion of the CDBG funds are being used to match Federal Historical Preservation funds to accomplish the intensive historic and architectural survey of the community.

Helen Pease Wolf shares pictures and her knowledge of early-day Lodge Grass with interviewer Maribeth Koch.

The survey is not just a luxury, it is particularly needed in Lodge Grass at this time. As a result of some of the pioneer families leaving, a number of older structures are abandoned and in need of restoration and repair. At the same time, the potential population growth from the coal development will force the community to move from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy. This transition, though gradual, has prompted private developers and local businesses to buy speculation property. All this makes the survey even more timely, since it is possible that structures of historic significance will be torn down and replaced by new buildings.

As a first step in the survey, each and every building in Lodge Grass was photographed. We brought these photographs to meetings wth the Senior Citizens and the local Advisory Council to figure out which structures date back to the town's beginnings. Since very little has been written concerning the history or development of Lodge Grass, historic information for the survey came primarily from the old photographs, a mail-out questionnaire, group meetings, and interviews with members of the founding families. The cooperation and enthusiasm shown by the people of Lodge Grass was very gratifying.

Researching the history of the older buildings in town brought some surprises. For example, the contemporary appearance of the Pease House gives few clues, but historic photographs and oral interviews with Helen Pease Wolf established this as one of the earliest and more significant dwellings in the community. The house was built by George Pease, the son of Major Fellows D. Pease who was the first Indian Agent for Crow Reservation, assigned in 1871. Although the house was re-sided, the roof recovered, the front porch enclosed, and the windows altered, the Pease House has retained its basic form and may easily be recognized in the old photographs.

Another structure of particular interest in Lodge Grass is the Schinderline House. Built in 1909, this home is the only one in town constructed of carved sandstone blocks. Although the Schinderline House has changed hands throughout the years, it is now back in the family that originally built it.

Lodge Grass became more than just an Indian and government camp, when W.A.

Montana surveys so far

Historic Resource Surveys are taking place in many communities around Montana. Most of these surveys are receiving some assistance from the federal Historic Preservation Fund grant program. These grant funds are limited and each federal dollar received by a community must be "matched" by at least the same amount in local funds or donations.

Donations need not be exclusively in cash. Many surveys are employing volunteers whose donated time may be used as match for the Historic Preservation dollars. The involvement of local people in a survey effort is vital to the success of the project. "In-kind" donations other than services might be office space for a survey's headquarters, telephone service or perhaps the use of darkroom facilities.

While some communities are using in-kind donations for the total match, others depend upon the availability of Community Development Block Grant funds. In some instances, city and county funds have been used and even donations from Chambers of Commerce have helped support surveys. Private donations from interested groups and individuals should not be overlooked as possibilities, especially if these donations can be used to spur fund-raising activities. Corporations or businesses interested in developing specific areas may be required by law to complete some survey work before starting their projects. These surveys may be coordinated with other local survey efforts and the corporate funds used to match the federal funds.

SURVEYS COMPLETED

Fort Benton Historic Survey, used Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) dollars under the supervision of a local historian who donated many hours of his time.

Missoula Historical Resource Survey, used HPF dollars matched with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and the equivalent of salaries for volunteer workers.

Pryor Mountain Survey (1980 portion). HPF dollars matched with University of Maine funds and the salary equivalent for a volunteer anthropology professor.

Kalispell Historical and Architectural Inventory, Livingston Historic Preservation Survey, and ***Troy Historical and Architectural Survey***, all used HPF dollars matched with CDBG funds.

Red Lodge Historical and Architectural Survey. HPF dollars matched with private donations.

State Building Survey. Accomplished as a service to all Montana state agencies by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Historic Bridges in Montana. Funded by the Montana State Highway Department under auspices of Historic American Engineering Record.

One Room Schoolhouses of Gallatin County. Prepared by School of Architecture, Montana State University.

Billings Historic and Architectural Resource Survey. HPF dollars matched with CDBG funds, donation from city and equivalent of salaries for volunteer workers. Volunteers trained by survey consultant; workshops, a luncheon, flyers, and newspaper and TV stories used to recruit volunteers; and local Boy Scouts volunteered to paste contact photographs on inventory forms. At one point there were 42 volunteers actively working on this survey.

Dillon Centennial Historical Survey. HPF dollars matched with CDBG funds.

West Yellowstone Historical and Architectural Survey. HPF dollars matched with county funds through West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce.

SURVEYS IN PROGRESS

Plains Historical and Architectural Survey. No outside funding, all work being done by volunteers on local individuals' own initiative.

Philipsburg Historic and Architectural Survey. HPF dollars matched with county funds, in-kind donations and the equivalent of salaries for volunteer workers. Volunteer researcher is University of Montana history student.

Deer Lodge Inventory of Historical Structures. HPF dollars matched with in-kind donations and equivalent of salaries for volunteer workers. Volunteers will do research, take photographs and serve as secretaries.

Butte National Landmark Survey (Phase 1)—Northwest Neighborhood. HPF dollars matched with ARCO funds and equivalent of salaries for volunteer workers. Volunteers from Butte Historical Society are to do background research and inventorying.

Helena Historic Resource Survey. HPF dollars matched with CDBG funds and equivalent of salaries for volunteer workers.

Hot Springs Historical Survey. HPF dollars matched with CDBG funds and equivalent of salaries for volunteer workers. Volunteers include a research historian and photographer.

Lodge Grass Historical Preservation Survey. HPF dollars matched with CDBG funds. Senior citizens volunteered their time for oral interviews and brought in photographs.

Northern Cheyenne Historic and Cultural Resource Survey. Northern Cheyenne tribal funds to be used.

Pryor Mountain Survey (1981 portion). HPF dollars matched with University of Maine funds and equivalent of salaries for volunteer anthropology, geology and geography professors.

SURVEYS BEING CONTEMPLATED

The Butte and Northern Cheyenne surveys will be done in planned stages over the next several years. The Pryor Mountain archeological survey is also a continuing project.

Lodge Grass as it looked about 1917.

Petzoldt built the first Baptist mission school in 1903. The Baptist Mission School Church in New York was asked by the Crow Tribe to sponsor a school because the people wanted their children at home rather than at the boarding school in Crow Agency. As families settled permanently near the new school, local commerce soon expanded. Two trading posts were built in 1902, and in 1904, the permanent brick structure now known as Stevenson Store was built by A. M. Stevenson. The store is still operated by his grandchildren. The other trading post, built by George Pease, changed hands several times and was eventually abandoned. However, it still stands, looking very much as it did in 1902. In the ensuing years a bank, two hotels, hardware store, granary, train depot, lumber yard, butcher shop, drug stores, shoe shop and numerous homes were built. Most of the commercial buildings, though still standing, are now abandoned. More interviews are being conducted with the citizens and a comparison file of old and new photographs is being constructed. Through their enthusiastic help, the people of Lodge Grass have made this survey their personal effort, and a source of regenerated pride in the community.

Who should receive SHPO's '81 awards?

The State Historic Preservation Office is accepting suggestions for candidates for the 1981 Historic Preservation Awards, which will be presented October 2 at the Montana History Conference in Helena.

This awards program is designed to recognize and publicize sound, creative preservation work regardless of whether public money or public processes were involved. It is not officially linked with the grants program or National Register of Historic Places activity handled by the Preservation Office.

Awards will be given in two categories—to people or organizations, and for projects. The first award honors those whose work, in rehabilitation, survey, writing or organizing, has been especially effective in broadening and educating community interest in preservation. The projects category recognizes rehabilitation work that is innovative, sound and economically productive or sustaining.

The Preservation Office needs brief suggestions of people or projects for these awards, not lengthy nominations. To suggest a candidate, send a brief description of the activities or project to Dr. Robert Archibald, Director, Montana Historical Society, before September 23.

Funding status report

As of press time, we did not have final word on the status of appropriations for the Historic Preservation Fund for Fiscal Year 1982 (October 1982—September 1983). So we do not know how much we may be receiving from HPF for grant projects, or even if we will receive any funding.

If you remember, the Reagan administration recommended no funding for any State Historic Preservation activities, including both planning and rehabilitation grants. However, before Congress's August recess, the House and Senate appropriations committees both recommended funding of $26.5 million for nationwide historic preservation activity (compared to $32.5 million appropriated for the current fiscal year, FY 81).

While final amounts and conditions for use will have to be approved by the House and Senate after the recess, we are encouraged by the current support of grant funding. It appears likely, though, that in approving the limited grant funds for the coming fiscal year, Congress may restrict the use of this money to planning activities only. This will eliminate funding for actual rehabilitation work, the "bricks and mortar" aspect of the preservation grant program.

It is important to remember, though, that the current funding debate will not affect the money already committed by the appropriations from previous fiscal years. That funding remains solid.

Preservation Perspectives

by Marcella Sherfy

Of all the historic preservation activity we encourage, surveying is the most important and the least glamorous. Compare it to actual building restoration. You can watch an old, neglected property take on new life with the replacement of bricks and shingles. But the process of conducting an architectural and historical inventory is relatively invisible and the benefits less splashy or immediate. In fact, because a survey results first in completed inventory forms like the one reproduced in this issue, it is subject to the charge of generating useless paper rather than new places to live.

Greet that charge with healthy skepticism. Like lots of other instances in life, the quietness of the survey process demonstrates rather than detracts from its value. It is relatively easy to spend money on a fancy old building in a community. It's not so easy to be sure in spending that money—be it ours or Uncle Sam's—that the choice of a property or the number of dollars expended constitutes a good investment. For a community intending to make good use of its heritage, the odds for gambling on a given property get better the more it knows about all the properties in town.

Let me illustrate that claim with an analogy. Most of us pass through adulthood with a grab bag of belongings: gifts (wanted or otherwise) alongside carefully-chosen furnishings, family treasures mingled with garage sale bargains. Every now and then something provokes us into taking stock of that collection—perhaps packing for a move or furnishing a daughter's new apartment. Usually with some system, we look more carefully at what we've got than we do in the course of ordinary days, pulling some things out of dark storage and relegating others to Goodwill. Sometimes, we'll end up wishing for things thrown away earlier.

An architectural and historical survey is that stock-taking process on a community or neighborhood scale, often provoked by similar causes. A community survey, because it involves so many lives and so much property, must be more organized than what we undertake in our own attics, but the results should be similar: a better sense of what we've got and a sounder basis on which to decide what to keep; what to spend money on; what to defend from outside interference; how to keep what we like. Note that in both cases, the *process* of inventorying is as important as its conclusion.

Don't let anyone dissuade you from considering an inventory with the argument that what is historically important in your community is obvious. Indeed, most of us as families or communities can agree respectively on the value of two or three home or city heirlooms: the grandfather's clock; the city hall; the hand-carved rocker; the earliest log cabin. But those properties are not likely to be threatened or neglected anyway. A survey forces us to identify and think about those older properties whose values are more elusive: the houses we drive by so often we don't even consider; the buildings whose exteriors don't reveal the importance of their original occupants; the properties whose craftsmanship can't be seen from a car window; or the neighborhoods that are lived in by folks we don't know so well.

This issue of *Preservation* is devoted to explaining architectural and historical surveys in greater detail and telling you how they can be accomplished, using examples from the communities who've undertaken them recently. I invite you to read it considering what might come if systematic curiosity were applied to the buildings in your own community.

Don't stop here! If you are interested in learning more about surveying, if you would like to discuss the various sources of funding for surveys, or if you want to know if any surveys have been done in your area, please feel free to contact us at the Preservation Office.